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SUBJECT: REO VISITS DHAKA Q REVIEWS ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

¶1. SUMMARY. REO John Adams and FSN Jay Pal Shrestha visited Dhaka March 7 Q 14 as part of a series of regular regional visits. They met with embassy personnel, GOB officials, and NGOs to assess major environmental issues facing Bangladesh. They also visited USAID projects in the field, and participated in the International Conference on Water and Floods Management organized by the Institute of Water and Flood Management of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). END SUMMARY

¶2. Environmental Compliance: Dr. Khandaker Rashedul Haque, Director, EIA Directorate, Department of Environment, said current staff levels in his Department are inadequate to monitor environmental compliance in Bangladesh. With only 250 employees currently, he has put forward a proposal requesting 1,500 more. NOTE: REO feels that this proposal is unlikely to receive serious consideration absent substantial GOB administrative reform and reprioritization. END NOTE.

¶3. Regional Water Resource Management: Dr. Mir Sajjad Hossain, Director, Joint Rivers Commission, discussed the continuing challenge of establishing a regional approach to water resources management, expressing his opinion that the Indian Farraka barrage on the Ganges River has resulted in substantial environmental and economic impact on Bangladesh. He suggested that the U.S. could press India to adopt a regional approach to water resources management. He appreciated the U.S. role in sponsoring the Regional Flood Forecasting Project implemented by the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, which is aimed at establishing a South Asian system for exchanging real time flood information.

¶4. USAID Funded Projects: Darrell Deppert from Winrock International described the success of the USAID-funded MACH aquatic ecosystem management project. He was concerned about the transition between the end of USAID support for the program in June and the World Bank's expected assumption of support and replication of the project in other areas of Bangladesh. REO visited the Baikka Beel Sanctuary portion of the MACH project in Srimongol, where dry season wetlands conservation practices are increasing the monsoon fish catch and attracting numerous migratory birds. REO and FSN met a local womenQs group that had borrowed money from MACHQs micro-finance programs to start diverse small businesses, thereby relieving pressure on the areaQs fish resources. Also while in Srimongol, Philip DeCosse of International Resources Group facilitated a visit to the USAID-funded Nishorgo project at Lawachara Park and introduced a local menQs group who had learned through the program to use the park's resource base in a sustainable, environmentally friendly way.

¶5. Urban Waste Solutions: A. H. Md. Maqsood Sinha and Mr. Iftekhar Enayetullah, co-founders and executive directors of Waste Concern, gave a detailed explanation on establishing DhakaQs first renewable urban waste management system. Their system is being copied in

Vietnam and Sri Lanka, and they are receiving more requests for technical support. Waste Concern's key concept is to commoditize the waste and recycle the biodegradable components into compost fertilizers.

¶6. Education of Water Resource Professionals: Dr. A. Atiq Rahman, Executive Director, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, described its new graduate science program in the area of gender and water, supported by the Dutch. He expects that in the next ten years there will be 450 graduates and over half will be women. He added that he was also working with the International Foundation for Science based in Sweden to provide proposal writing training to 15 South Asia water professionals annually.

¶7. Conference on Water and Flood Management: The Netherlands' Embassy and the Institute of Water and Flood Management of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) co-sponsored the Conference, which attracted government officials, scientists, and engineers from all over Asia to look into the major water resource and flood management challenges facing Bangladesh. One of the major issues raised was the environmental impact of the rapidly growing shrimp industry on inland waters: salt water is being pumped up from the Bay of Bengal to shrimp farms, pushing the line of salinity northward and degrading soil quality.

¶8. REO cleared this cable.

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